



JAMES W. EDMING

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 87TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 91
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
June 8, 2023

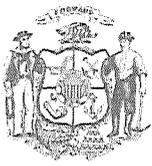
Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today and allowing me to speak to you in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 91. This proposal is a reintroduction of 2021 AB 38 that unanimously passed through this committee last session.

As our brave men and women in the armed forces transition from the military back into civilian life, many look to continue their education at one of our state's outstanding public universities or technical colleges. AB 91 reduces the financial burden on these folks by waiving the application fee charged by these institutions. While the cost of a college application fee may not seem like a big deal, for a veteran or service member struggling financially, it could be what keeps them from applying to the educational institution they really want to attend or from applying for college at all.

While some institutions are currently waiving application fees in an effort to increase enrollment, this may not always be the case. Of the public technical colleges and universities charging application fees at this time, most are in the \$25-\$30 range. Our state's flagship university, UW-Madison, is a bit higher at \$60. If a veteran or service member can only afford to apply at one or two schools they will likely choose to apply to schools where they are more likely to be admitted. If a veteran or service member really wants to continue their education at a school with a lower acceptance rate like UW-Madison, their financial situation should not prevent them from attempting to gain admittance to our state's flagship university. Nor should they have to limit the number of schools they apply to because of fees.

AB 91 says thank you to those who have served our nation by removing a financial barrier for veterans and service members who want to continue their education at one of our state's public colleges and universities. An added benefit of this proposal is that by encouraging veterans to attend college in Wisconsin, it increases the likelihood that they stay in our state and become part of our workforce when they complete their education.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask for your support of this legislation and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.



Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

Senator André Jacque

June 8, 2023

Chairman Murphy and Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 91, which would exempt veterans and members of the armed forces from admissions application fees at University of Wisconsin System schools and technical colleges.

While the cost of a college application fee may not seem like a big deal, for a veteran or service member, it is another recruiting tool that gives Wisconsin a veteran-friendly reputation – along with policies such as exempting active-duty pay from state taxation and providing a quicker path to licensure for certain military healthcare workers. These types of initiatives could be the difference that keeps veterans in Wisconsin for higher education, and later as valued members of our skilled state workforce.

This proposal would apply to the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and UW System schools for all veterans and service members who apply to any associate or bachelor degree program, certificate, or technical diploma. In addition to being a sign of gratitude for their service, waiving the application fee will help bolster the recruitment of veterans to our state's colleges and universities. By encouraging our veterans to attend college in Wisconsin it increases the likelihood that they stay in our state after they complete their education and help fill our state's employment needs.

In the past, it has not been uncommon for individual technical colleges to waive fees for all applicants during limited time periods. Also, the vast majority of University of Wisconsin campuses are currently waiving application fees to open doors for lower-income students and fill seats at a time when many universities are struggling to increase enrollment. According to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, this is an “effort to remove barriers for students who might not be able to apply to college, or multiple colleges, because of financial barriers.” Assembly bill 91 will offer long-term predictability for those assisting veterans interested in continuing their education and training for the workforce.

When speaking with the Office of Veterans Affairs at Eastern Kentucky University, a campus that waives the application fees for veterans, the staff mentioned that not only are potential student veterans appreciative of the fee waiver, but it also removes the initial financial burden that sometimes keeps veterans from applying to college in the first place.

This proposal (2021 Senate Bill 44/Assembly Bill 38) passed the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities last session by a unanimous vote of 14-0 and was supported by the Wisconsin Economic Development Association and Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 91. I'd be happy to answer any questions.



Office of Government Relations

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DATE: June 8, 2023

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: UW System Office of Government Relations

RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 91

Thank you, Chairman Murphy and committee members, for providing the UW System (UWS) an opportunity to submit testimony on Assembly Bill 91. We appreciate Representative Edming's and Senator Jacque's interest in increasing access to higher education for veterans and U.S. armed services members.

The UW System, with 13 universities and 26 campuses, has one of the most robust programs for veterans and service members in the country. We strive to provide a welcoming higher educational setting for service members, veterans, and their families. Each of our universities has a veteran service department that provides comprehensive support to veterans. Dedicated campus staff assist veterans with transferring credits, navigating benefits, and connecting veterans with each other and the campus community.

AB 91 would create a permanent exemption to application fees at UWS schools and technical colleges for veterans and members of the U.S. armed forces. Currently, UWS does not charge an application fee for any applicant at 10 of our 13 universities. This has been in effect since December 2020 when the Board of Regents (BOR) issued a temporary waiver of application fees. Due to the large increase in student applications with the temporary waiver, the BOR voted in February 2022 to extend the waiver indefinitely, subject to an annual review of the policy's effectiveness. Therefore, under current BOR policy, AB 91 would only pertain to veterans and members of the U.S. armed forces who are applying to the three UW campuses that do charge an application fee.

As part of the annual application fee review, UWS is considering a change to the current waiver at 10 of our universities that would recreate a fee if a student applied for more than three universities at once. The annual review indicates that although the application fee waiver has been successful in encouraging applicants, it has also hindered campus enrollment officers in assessing whether a student is truly interested in attending a particular campus or if the applicant is only applying because it is free. With limited budgets, it is imperative that enrollment officers can provide resources to students with a true interest in enrolling at a specific school. This change is only under consideration, but we want to provide the committee with this information as AB 91 is being discussed. If UWS were to make this change to the current application fee waiver, under AB 91 veterans and members of the U.S. armed forces would be exempt from this change.

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Again, we appreciate the author's interest in encouraging more veterans and members of the U.S. armed forces to apply and enroll in at UWS schools. We are in a war for talent in Wisconsin, and we share the author's intent in providing access to our universities to all who are interested in pursuing higher education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this legislation.